

---

Title	Globalisation and education policy bringing the state back in
Author(s)	S. Gopinathan
Source	Oxford International Conference on Education and Development: Globalisation and Learning, 21-25 September 1995, Oxford, UK

---

Copyright © 1995 The Author

This document may be used for private study or research purpose only. This document or any part of it may not be duplicated and/or distributed without permission of the copyright owner.

The Singapore Copyright Act applies to the use of this document.

Citation: Gopinathan, S. (1995, September). *Globalisation and education policy bringing the state back in*. Paper presented at the Oxford International Conference on Education and Development: Globalisation and Learning, Oxford, UK.

This document was archived with permission from the copyright holder.

**GLOBALISATION AND EDUCATION POLICY  
BRINGING THE STATE BACK IN**

**S. Gopinathan**

**Paper presented at the "Globalisation and Learning" Conference,  
held in New College, Oxford, on Sep 1995**

# Globalisation and Education Policy: Bringing the State Back In

*S. Gopinathan*  
National Institute of Education  
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

## Abstract

This paper explores the concept of globalisation and educational policy making in the context of a recently developed 'strong state', Singapore. It suggests both the need to clarify more clearly the concept of globalisation from such concepts as dependency and centre-periphery and to avoid overly deterministic accounts of the influence of global trends on education policy making. An analysis is provided of policy initiatives in Singapore between 1979 and 1991 located within state-based imperatives to respond both to global and state-centric challenges.

Paper presented at the "Globalisation and Learning" Conference, New College, Oxford, September 1995. Convened by the UK Forum for International Education and Training.

1st Working Draft. Not for citation. All correspondence to S Gopinathan, School of Education, Nanyang Technological University. E-mail [GOPI@NIEVAX.NIE.AC.SG](mailto:GOPI@NIEVAX.NIE.AC.SG)

## Introduction

As we approach the end of the second millennium the world community is experiencing a convergence process, globalisation, that is quite unprecedented in history. Globalisation is commonly understood to be primarily a process of economic integration in which the owners of capital, financiers and money managers, among others, have been able to overcome the constraints of nation state boundaries to bring about global economic integration. Such has been the reach and size of some multinational companies that they dwarf, and often swamp, the national economies of small and not so small states. An international production system has also emerged. With the movement of capital has come flows of technology and of manpower, a process aided by the second major element of globalisation, the emergence of different modes of telecommunication and computer technology that has made the movement of data and information much more transnational and flexible. Other aspects of globalisation include the emergence of environmental and conservation consciousness and the new cross-border roles of NEOs like Amnesty International, Greenpeace the World Wildlife Fund, among others. As a consequence of these movements some commentators have spoken of the fatal weakening of the power and autonomy of the state due to the erosion of regulatory power of national governments and legislatures, especially over financial matters. As M. Hirsh puts it "the new power at the world's centre stage [are] the multinational corporations and the increasingly rootless technologies and financial elites who run them." Yet others see globalisation as a integrating process that is rapidly eroding the distinctions between the economic, political and cultural domains.

How useful is globalisation as a concept for analysing educational phenomena? It is certainly the case that the new communication and computer technologies may be seen as contributing towards the rapid emergence of a global culture understood as the universalisation of such cultural symbols as the extensive use of English, the spread of MacDonaldis, Guess jeans, Coca-Cola, Nike, Michael Jackson, the popularity of MTV and other icons of American culture. In so far as education is about the production of identity and meaning it is to be understood as a cultural process and therefore available for analysis within the context of globalisation.

There is as yet only a limited literature on how we may understand educational processes using globalisation as a concept. How is educational globalisation different from such earlier concepts as neo-colonialism, internationalism, dependency, or centre-periphery? After all the education work of Unesco, OECD, the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, the business of educational and cultural entrepreneurs like the British Council, the Cambridge Examination Syndicate and the Educational Testing Service, to name but a few,

have been in existence for close on half a century. It could be argued that the institutions named above are international organizations in which nation-states had a major interest; global organizations like the International Coalition for Development Action or the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement or the World Confederation of the Teaching Profession (WCOTP) transcend national boundaries. While it is clear that earlier conceptualisations, especially of the critical kind implied a malign intent on the part of the powerful nations or status groups, and the capitalistic West was seen as the dominant partner in the relationship it is less clear if this is true of globalisation as well. After all Japan is now a major aid donor, the Japanese education model is widely admired and some of the new technological marvels like the Walkman, the CDs, the VCR and electronic games did not originate from the West.

Globalisation theorists need to avoid the errors of earlier scholars who saw nations on the periphery as helpless and exploited, with little possibility for even relative autonomy and integrate into their analysis critiques of such deterministic outlooks. It is much too early to argue for the inevitable collapse or subversion of national institutions, let alone the nation state. There is an important emergent literature on the development of economically strong states in East Asia which detail non-Western models of socio-economic organization, schooling and training structures and national-level purpose and autonomy; it is also possible to argue, for instance, that Japanese and Korean multinationals have a different relationship with their governments than US multinationals and their aims and roles in the global economy may be different. The central place of schooling in the society and economy figures largely in these accounts. Strong states are able to achieve a tight coupling between education and the economy and thus minimize slippages and make education have a more direct impact on the economy. Globalisation theorists also need to deal with issues linked to the current US push for the adoption globally of free-market and human rights assumptions and the increasingly strong and coherent opposition to these assumptions from many East Asian states. A culture-based alternative, primarily Confucian in nature is increasingly being used in East Asia as both an explanatory and organizational variable. It should also be noted that if Indonesia and Malaysia manage to succeed economically in the next two decades Islamic ideas are also likely to feature prominently in the development of alternate social forms.

This paper takes the position that relative autonomy exists even in a globalising world and attempts to demonstrate that with reference to major policy initiatives in the eighties. It is important to pay attention not only to global trends but also national reactions to them and to explore the 'micropolitics' of educational decision making as it plays out on a national stage.

### The Singapore Context

Two features of the Singapore context are worthy of note in this discussion of globalisation and education. The first is that as a small island with no national resources

except a strategic location in resource - rich South-East Asia, Singapore's survival always depended on its usefulness to major powers. It attracted colonial interest because it provided a well placed base for economic penetration and the colonial experience, 1819-1963, served to deepen Singapore's integration into Britain's economic empire. Even as there was political contestation in the 1950s over culture, language, and political issues there was early recognition of the value of English as an economic resource. Early planning for transforming Singapore's economy from a entrepot to an industrial one in the late fifties recognised the need for foreign capital, technology and markets. Singapore thus eschewed the ideology of economic nationalism that characterised many de-colonised states. This clear grasp of the need for economic openness to global economic forces still characterizes planning in Singapore even though Singapore is now considered a developed economy with a per capita income of about US\$20,000. External trade is a major component of Singapore's economy and Singapore's leaders are very fond of making international comparisons as a way of benchmarking achievements. In the early nineties a major societal goal was to equal the 'Swiss standard of living'; Singaporeans are very proud of Singapore Airlines profitability and popularity. Comparisons of the productivity of Singapore's workforce, of levels of corruption and of political stability are common ways of globalising Singapore, both for its own citizens and for foreign investors.

It follows from the characteristics noted above that Singapore has also had a long history of borrowing educational ideas and practices from other countries. As a colony, metropolitan models and practices were transplanted, albeit in modified form, into Singapore. Christian missionary societies were responsible for establishing many English medium schools and the Queen's Scholarships were responsible for enabling bright students to travel to Britain to further their studies overseas. With a large Chinese migrant population Singapore's educational development was also influenced by educational ideas, teachers, curriculum materials and ideology from China. For much of the nineteenth century Chinese-medium schools in Singapore were patterned on schools in China and the changes in schooling occasioned by the 1911 Revolution were also copied in Singapore. Traditional Islamic educational institutions like the *madrasahs* modelled on similar institutions in the Middle East were also to be found in Singapore. In the post-independence period Singapore sought for non-British models of technical training and ideas were borrowed from Swiss and German experiences. The Economic Development Board for instance invited major companies like Rollei, Tata and Phillips to set up technical training institutions in Singapore. At other times the Ministry sent study teams of principals to the US, the UK and Taiwan to study systems of education with a view to incorporating desirable practices into the Singapore system.

Yet, while Singapore has been an avid borrower and sensitive of the need to be useful to all, its policy makers have also sought to ensure that Singapore is not swamped by external forces nor become a client-state. The recognition of the value of English was counterbalanced by the insistence that all students learn a second language, Mandarin, Tamil or Malay. In the

early seventies, long before the internationalization of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, then Prime Minister was spelling out the need to 'remain ourselves' and not end up aping the West. This preoccupation with Singapore's cultural identity was, of course, due to the need to manage skillfully and sensitively Singapore's ethnic and linguistic plurality and the fact that Singapore had a Chinese-majority population in an area dominated by Malay-Muslim communities. Singapore's leaders recognised early the value of the civilizational wisdom represented by Singapore's ethnic groups. Recognition and affirmation of ethnic cultural values then formed the basis for articulating the boundaries of Singapore's socio-cultural identity; the strategy was both to value ethnic culture as well as to point to 'undesirable' elements and features of Western society. This tendency is now more fully articulated and Singapore's view of the need to be ourselves covers the nature of social organization i.e. emphasis on preserving the family as a core unit of society, of political organization i.e. the Westminster model of democracy is not appropriate for all and nations must be allowed to develop their own forms, of human rights i.e. that the cultural context for its expression must be taken into account ; it has also aligned itself to the view that the neo-Confucian ideology is both a sensible and valuable alternative framework for socio-economic and political organization.

### Globalisation and the Educational Policy Process

A basic tenet of globalisation is that in a rapidly integrating world dominant ideas/ideologies take on a global character in that they penetrate and/or are adopted by a large number of social groups. These dominant ideas are seen to arise most likely from economically and militarily powerful countries and their spread is aided by the control of mass media, telecommunications technology and the political power of these nations to set global agendas. In the last two decades the free-market and anti-welfare sentiments of Ronald Reagan in the US and Margaret Thatcher in the UK, coupled with the collapse of the command economy in the former Soviet Union, have swept the globe. Reagan and Thatcher viewed education as captured by state bureaucracies and unions, sought to deregulate and decentralize, to offer more power and choice to parents and employers and in a paradoxical way introduced an element of centralization, especially in the UK, as they sought to introduce a national curriculum and to insist on regular testing. Educational reform and economic modernization are the major themes for global education in the nineties. The policy environment changed dramatically in the UK and in Australia as governments legislated new initiatives, broke the power of unions and challenged long settled educational assumptions. Because the state had both regulatory and allocative power it was able to set the policy agenda and involve itself heavily in areas previously seen as the province of teachers alone.

Singapore's educational policy environment can then only be understood within its larger social-political context. Singapore society in the fifties was the classical plural society with deep ethnic and linguistic segmentation. It was poor, had a rapidly rising birthrate and

had little prospects for economic survival. With a dominant Chinese majority it was regarded with suspicion by Malaya and Indonesia; a powerful Communist terrorist campaign in Malaya and evidence of Communist infiltration in the trade unions, schools, cultural and media organizations made the British anxious about giving Singapore independence. A four media of instruction school system mirrored the endemic fragmentation of Singapore society. Political identity was contested terrain and the agencies of government had little power.

The educational legacy of the British was a segmented school system with deep resentment on the part of the non-English educated; it was largely community support that kept the Chinese-medium schools alive and enabled the Chinese-medium Nanyang University to be founded in 1956. The first major post-war educational report, The All Party Report on Chinese Education was as much a political as well as an educational document. In proposing the 'equality of treatment' principle it gave legitimacy to the aspirations of the non-English educated, made multiculturalism and multilingualism core assumptions for the management of ethnic diversity and led to the allocation of substantial resources in building first, an integrated, and later a unified, national system of education. In the sixties, and especially when Singapore became independent in 1965 the government propounded a value system that linked bilingualism and 'Asian' cultural values as the preferred socialisation mode.

The shaping of a national identity, and the management of ethnic diversity through the education system was, as indicated earlier, contested. Equality meant not just the provision of resource inputs but the extension of Ministry of Education control over curriculum, educational structure, examinations, teacher qualifications and fitness to teach, conditions of service etc. That control was bitterly resisted but the Ministry eventually prevailed, but the legacy of a heavily politicised educational policy environment remains to this day; education remains politically sensitive and the ethnic dimension in education has led to continuing political oversight in education.

It is also important to note other features of the policy environment in Singapore. Singapore has today a deserved reputation for strong, able and corruption-free administration. Its social reconstruction activities, in public housing, health care, transportation, to name a few, are closely studied in other parts of the developing world; Singapore with a population of less than 3 million has an airline and airport whose profitability and efficiency are second to none and is building an entire industrial park and township in China. Singapore's leaders, aided by the fact that their political party has been power since 1959, have a clear political vision - to remain nationally cohesive, independent and economically competitive. There is belief in strong political and socio-economic institutions working to a common purpose within a framework of aims set by the government and the government has managed to make the senior civil service prestigious, demanding and authoritative. Careful attention is paid to implementation details, projects are well resourced and there is an openness to selective borrowing of 'good ideas' from abroad.



One final feature that distinguishes Singapore is that it is resource rich; it has a per capita income of almost US\$20,000, US\$50 billion in reserves, has one of the world's highest savings rates and has had real GNP growth of about 9% for a decade and a half. The inflation rate is low and there has been substantial asset enhancement, especially in housing. Though transportation and health costs are rising there is little evidence of gross income inequality; rather, even as Singapore eschews the welfare state mentality there is much evidence of redistributive policies. Obviously in such a policy context the capacity to articulate and implement policy with confidence is much different from other less fortunate countries.

### Education Policy Initiatives in Singapore 1979 - 1991

In this section, I detail four major policy initiatives in Singapore that profoundly altered the shape of the system. These initiatives are the introduction of ability based streaming as proposed in the Report on the Ministry of Education 1979, the establishment of independent schools following the Towards Excellence in Schools Report, the establishment of ethnic self-help (education) groups with Mendaki in 1981 and the provision of 10 years general education as recommended by the 1991 Improving Primary School Education Report. As I shall argue in the following pages while the rhetoric may sound globally familiar the reality is more closely tied to nation-level politics and concerns.

### The Report on the Ministry of Education (Goh Report, 1979)

As noted earlier, the educational response to pluralism in Singapore was the policy of bilingualism, with English as the common link language and an ethnic language, Malay, Tamil and Mandarin as second languages. As language and culture policies had been politicised in the fifties, policy making with regard to bilingualism was often a response to political pressures, to demands for more resources, more curriculum time and to equality. To ensure compliance, second language instruction was made compulsory at both primary and secondary levels and closely tied to the assessment system. It became apparent in the seventies that the requirements were too demanding but because the policy was 'sensitive' few spoke up.

It took the efforts of the then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, Dr Goh Keng Swee, to declare that many pupils were being pushed out of the system at the end of grade six due to failure in one or the other language, leading to wastage and that secondary school leavers were not sufficiently bilingual. His proposals were for the introduction of ability-based streaming at the end of grade 3 and the introduction of an ability differentiated curriculum and extensions to length of schooling for the weaker pupils. Pupils were also to be tracked at the secondary level. The government committed considerable resources to materials development and teacher training to meet the needs of these pupils.

## Towards Excellence in Schools (1986)

While the Goh report was primarily concerned with weaker pupils, the Towards Excellence in Schools Report was designed to answer the question - how can Singapore's best pupils be provided with an education that will enable them to provide the leadership to meet the challenges of a post-industrial economy? As mentioned earlier, politicisation of education and the need to assert state authority had led to a centralisation to policy making power in the Ministry of Education. Equality of treatment had created a more level playing field but also a numbing sameness in schools. The first Deputy Prime Minister, and present Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong spoke in 1985 of the need to give selected schools more autonomy to set fees, hire and fire teachers and to plan for curriculum enrichment. Greater autonomy was intended to spark creativity and innovation.

In 1986, the government sent 12 carefully chosen school principals to study a number of high quality schools in the US and UK. The report of their study visit, Towards Excellence in Schools recommended the establishment of independent schools to be managed by a Board of Governors who would have power to appoint the principal and hire and fire and offer improved salaries for teachers, set fees, decide on admission policies, approve major financial projects, and ensure a challenging and enriched curriculum. As only a small number of schools could go independent, the Minister of Education promised that innovations and improved practices would trickle down to the other schools, thus raising the standards of all. It was also announced that as fees were likely to be higher than at state schools the government would provide for financial aid and bursaries so that no student would be prevented from attending an independent school due to an inability to pay fees. In 1988, 3 aided government schools went independent; to date 8 schools have become independent including 2 state schools.

## Improving Primary School Education (1991)

The economic imperatives for education were not fully met by the Goh and Excellence reports. In the mid-eighties, Singapore experienced a sharp but short recession. An analysis showed that while the economic fundamentals were sound, Singapore had an under-educated labour force in comparison with countries like the US, Taiwan and Japan. Land and labour costs had gone up sharply and the opening up of China and Indonesia would cause labour-intensive industries to move out. Singapore education had two challenges, to prepare for the leadership that the post-industrial economy, with its premium on knowledge-based industries, flexible production structures and entrepreneurship would require and the broadly-educated labour force that would be needed to support the new industries.

The effective implementation of the proposals in the Goh Report had cut down attrition but the system was still pushing out up to 20% of the cohort of students at the end of 6 - 8 years of schooling into early vocational training. Vocational trainers, in their turn, found these students ill prepared and poorly motivated for a labour short economy provided ample jobs.

The principal recommendations of the Improving Primary School Education Report were to postpone streaming by 1 year, ie. at grade 4, to remove the Primary School Leaving Examination as a pass-fail examination and to allow all students to go on to secondary schools to complete an additional 4 - 5 years of secondary education. The Report accepted the notion of ability differences and proposed a new track, Normal Technical, be introduced with a separate curriculum for these pupils. It also proposed that Institutes of Technical Education be established to cater to post-secondary school leavers.

#### Ethnic Underachievement: The Establishment of Mendaki 1982

While the Report on the Ministry of Education and the Excellence Report were concerned with students at the two ends of the ability spectrum, the system and the political establishment had also to contend with persistent Malay under-achievement in the system. The government's major preoccupation in the sixties and seventies was to pacify the Chinese-educated and to provide via education better and more equal educational opportunities. Unlike Malaysia, Singapore's closest neighbour Singapore could not afford, with a Chinese majority, and one which had a history of British-led discrimination, an affirmative action policy. All had to advance by merit. The Malays were handicapped in this pursuit by a variety of familial, cultural and structural factors. In the early eighties, Malays were performing poorly at the Primary and Secondary school leaving examinations; at the primary level for instance only 47% of the Malay cohort passed compared to 68% for non-Malays. Malays were also under-represented at the National University of Singapore with only 384 students in 1983. In 1980, it was also the case that the majority of Malays in the labour force was concentrated in low-income occupations.

The government's response was to encourage the establishment of the Council on Education for Muslim Children, to involve Malay political leaders and the community in determining the causes of this poor performance and to devise and implement solutions. The Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew said that a 'government-run scheme cannot achieve a quarter of the results of this voluntary spontaneous effort by Malay/Muslims to help themselves. To finance the community effort, the government not only provided assistance but also amended the administration of Muslim Law Act to enable Malays to voluntarily contribute a sum of 50 cents a month. Similar provisions were made by the Central Provident Fund to enable contributions to be made on a monthly basis to MENDAKI.

## Discussion

How are we to understand the policy initiatives in education in Singapore within the context of globalisation of educational paradigms? As noted earlier, Singapore's very survival depends on an openness to global influences and in the realm of education it has been an avid but selective borrower. Singapore did not indulge itself in the linguistic nationalism of many post-colonial societies and because economic and political survival was a major societal project, education came under the control of a strong and able government. Fortunately for Singapore, the present government has been able to turn education into a coherent national institution, highly valued in Singapore and seen as relevant. At the same time as noted earlier the pluralism of Singapore society, the historical and political correlates of ethnicity, of societal conditions, necessitated close attention to the national implications of policies. It is this interweaving of the global and the national that we explore below.

The principal starting point for any analysis of education-society relations in the last two decades must be the economic crisis of western capitalism, especially in the US and the UK, the two countries whose experiences are most relevant to Singapore. New right conservatism led by Reagan and Thatcher targetted the ideology and institutions of the progressive welfare state as being responsible for big and inefficient government and a lack of economic competitiveness. What was first identified was 'evidence' of the erosion of educational standards, of low levels of literacy, numeracy, of general and scientific knowledge, followed in some cases by international comparisons of achievement. Local education authorities in the UK came under attack and were dismantled; power was to devolve to parents and the community, schools could free themselves from state bureaucracies to be more stringent and responsive. The assumption was that the discipline of the market would improve schools and make them more productive for the economy. In the US, the ideas of Chubb and Moe, for instance, gained wide currency. Chubb and Moe argued that private schools outperformed public schools because, among other factors, public schools were beholden to democratic authority and local politics; they were not free to act in the best educational interests of their pupils and parents.

Singapore's policy makers could easily identify with these sentiments. Economic instrumentalism was a cornerstone of schooling provision in Singapore and economic competitiveness the major national project. The language of rationalization in the Goh and the IPSE reports was the avoidance of 'wastage', the need to better educate manpower to service the economy. The extent of under-education in the workforce, revealed in the Economic Committee Report which analysed the mid-eighties recession shocked many and showed up the structural weakness in the system.

However, the policy responses had to take account of national educational realities. The demands of the bilingual policy on less able pupils was the cause of failure; the response was streaming rather than the abandonment of the bilingual policy. And streaming was not in the late seventies a popular global prescription for educational underachievement for the major British post-war educational reform had been comprehensive schooling designed to equalise opportunities and to make up for the limitations of the home environment.

Another important difference lay in the origins of the centralization process in Singapore. Singapore's policy makers were not uncomfortable with the power that Ministry bureaucrats possessed. Centralization, in Singapore's experience, was empowerment of a state institution to unify and strengthen education; it enabled both the political and the educational challenge to be met. Apart from some criticism on language policy implementation from the non-English medium teachers unions, Union-Ministry relations were amicable. Besides, there was a national system in place and a vast majority of schools were state schools; indeed the very best boys' and girls' schools, Raffles Institution and Raffles Girls' School were state schools.

If the Goh Report and the IPSE Report were principally about improving the quality of the workforce to be more economically competitive, how is the Excellence Report to be understood? It is in one sense also about economic competitiveness, the need in a mass education system to provide for creativity, innovation and enriching, and diversifying curriculum options and pedagogic strategies. But there are fundamental differences in the way that decentralization was implemented in Singapore. There was never any intention to free the whole system as only the very best schools could apply to go independent, and these schools traditionally drew the best pupils from the primary school cohort; in this sense, it was not about returning schools to the community as these were not community schools.

There are at least 4 reasons for decentralisation viz administrative motives, political motives concerning the desire to share power, ideological and financial, to privatize education to draw in more resources (McLean and Lauglo, 1985, Tan, 1993). The Singapore case is not about the devolution of primary decision making power in education nor is it really about privatizing education. There was no resource crisis in Singapore education; indeed the government has made a firm commitment to raise to 5% of GDP the budget for education which currently stands at about 3.5%. Neither is education seen principally as consumption in education which must draw then upon personal finances; overwhelmingly, it is seen as investment in scarce human resources.

A case could be made for seeing the move to set up independent schools, to devolve some decision making power to boards of management and school principals as principally administrative and pedagogical in nature. The administrative need rose from the acceptance that the top schools in Singapore were stable, high achieving schools with strong school

cultures and teaching staff who had demonstrated a capacity for sound educational planning and administration. It was not necessary to regulate their affairs from Ministry headquarters and could be freed. Without this belief, there would have been no move to deregulate. This conviction was supplemented by the recognition that Singapore needed to enrich the curriculum of its best students to encourage more creativity and innovation, and indeed to challenge its best students more. It was in this context that policy makers took heed of the literature on school effectiveness, on the role and potential of good school leaders, on the advantages of decoupling schools from excessive central control, of giving opportunity and responsibility to school staff to raise additional financing to meet the expenses of special programming in the curriculum. The Education Minister at that time, Dr Tony Tan, quoted with approval the views of Chubb and Moe but declared that "the authors' conclusions were drawn from their study of schools in America and should therefore not be taken as applying automatically to our schools in Singapore because the two societies are quite different". (Tan, 1987).

The policy response to the problems of ethnic underachievement in Singapore underline the thesis in this paper that national politics heavily determine the content of local policies. The major political-educational problem of the fifties and sixties was Chinese-educated disenchantment with the system, lack of facilities and poor performance and vocational opportunity. Given their numerical majority, their problems had to be attended to first and by the mid-seventies, the Chinese-medium schools were well on their way to being integrated into the system.

Given the political context, raising the issue of Malay underachievement was a risky political gamble. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew provided statistics and an analysis of the educational problem of the Malay community when he addressed the first MENDAKI congress in 1982. He pointed to the alarming consequences of such underachievement. He noted that large numbers did not make it to the university and that for the interim they must be encouraged to stay on in school and put in more effort and encouraged to go on to vocational institutes and polytechnics.

This singling out of an ethnic community, the detailed analysis of shortcomings has few parallels elsewhere. It is not that there are not concerns about ethnic underachievement but it would not have been politically feasible to deal with them in such an open manner by political figures. It is an aspect of the policy environment and political confidence that is essentially Singaporean.

Equally interesting is the fact that after detailing the problem and promising assistance, the government told the community to organize itself to solve the problem in a holistic way and to plan for the long haul. Lee urged the community "to build up an organization which,

besides tapping the altruistic and charitable impulses of the educated and successful Malays can also marshal funds ... "

The self-help strategy which has now been extended to the Indian and Chinese communities arises from the view that the state should tap actively into community sentiment and resources and that the individual and the family must expend effort on education. In the Western model community involvement is a way of reducing the state's burdens, of lowering expectations of the state's capacity to solve problems. It is primarily driven by the state's declining legitimacy and financial crisis. In the Singapore context, the state is both strong and has the financial resources. Community involvement is based on the belief that the family and community are proper and necessary instruments for ensuring success.

Bellows argues in his paper that the core of the state-centred approach must be economic social and political development accompanied by wide spread economic benefits and progressive political liberalization ... governments must have the capacity for policy formulation and innovation as well as the capacity to realize their political goals. The thesis of this paper has been that Singapore, extensively interconnected with global forces, both in terms of its history and current economic imperatives continues nevertheless to exhibit a sense of independence, of wanting to do things its way and an enviable capacity to formulate and implement policies. It borrows extensively but selectively in education and adapts and shapes models to fit national requirements. It will continue to do so.

## References

- Applebaum R.P and Henderson, J. (eds) (1992) States and Development in the Asian Pacific Rim . London. Sage Publications.
- Barkey, K. and Parikh, S. (1991) Comparative Perspectives on the State Annual Review of Sociology 17:523-49.
- Bellows, Thomas J. (1993) The Singapore Polity: Community, Leadership and Institutions Asia Journal of Political Science Vol. 1 No. 1, June
- Castells, M. (1988) The Developmental City State in an Open World Economy: The Singapore Experience. Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley Roundtable on the International Economy.
- Castells, M.(1992) Four Asian Tigers with a Dragon Head in Applebaum & Henderson (eds). States and Development in the Asian Pacific Rim. London: Sage Publications, 1992.
- Chan Heng Chee (1971) Singapore: The Politics of Survival 1965-1967 Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Chan Heng Chee (1989) 'The PAP and the Structuring of the Political System' in K. S. Sandhu and P. Wheatley (eds.) Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Chen, P. S. J. (ed.) (1983) Singapore Development Policies and Trends. Singapore: Oxford University Press.
- Clammer, J. (1985) Singapore: Ideology, Society and Culture. Singapore: Chopman Publishers.
- Evans, P., Rueschemeyer, D. Skocpol, T., (eds) (1985) Bringing the State Back In. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fuller, B. and Robinson, R.(1992) The Political Construction of Education: The State, School Expansion and Economic Change. New York: Praeger Publishers.



- Gold, T. B. (1986) State and Society in the Taiwan Miracle. Armonk, N.Y. : M.E. Sharpe.
- Gopinathan, S. (1974) Towards a National System of Education in Singapore 1945-1973. Singapore: Oxford University Press.
- Gopinathan, S. (1985) Education in John S. T. Quah, Chan Heng Chee and Seah Chee Meow (eds.) Government and Politics of Singapore. Singapore: Oxford University Press.
- Gopinathan, S. (1988) 'Being and Becoming: Education for Values in Singapore' in W. Cummings, S. Gopinathan, Y. Tomoda (eds.) The Revival of Values Education in Asia and the West. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Gopinathan, S. (1994) Language Policy Changes 1979-1992: Politics and Pedagogy in S Gopinathan et al (eds.) Language, Society and Education in Singapore. Singapore: Times Academic Press.
- Gopinathan, S. (1995) Educational Development in a Strong-Developmentalist State: The Singapore Experience in William K. Cummings and N. McGinn (eds.) Handbook of Education and Development. Garland Press (forthcoming).
- Green, Andy (1990) Education and State Formation: The Rise of Education Systems in England, France and the USA. New York: St. Martins Press.
- Hage, J., Garnier, M. A. and Fuller, B. (1988) The Active State, Investment in Human Capital and Economic Growth: France 1825-1975 American Sociological Review 1988, Vol. 53, 824-837.
- Hirsh, M. (1995) Newsweek, June 26.
- Lee Kuan Yew (1994) 'Confucian Values Helped Singapore Prosper' Straits Times, Oct. 6, 1994.
- Mc Cord, W. (1991) The Dawn of the Pacific Century: Implications for Three Worlds of Development. New Jersey: Transactions Publishers.

- Migdal, Joel S.(1988) Strong Societies and Weak States: State-society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
  
- Mclean M. and Lauglo J. (1985) Introduction: Rationales for decentralization and a perspective from organization theory in L. Lauglo and M. McLean (eds.). The Control of Education, international perspectives on the centralization - decentralization debate. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
  
- Ministry of Education (Singapore) Report on the Ministry of Education, 1979  
Towards Excellence in School, 1986  
Improving Primary School Education, 1991
  
- Ohmae, K. (1990) The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy. London: Collins.
  
- Quah, J.S.T. (1984) The Public Policy-Making Process in Singapore. The Asian Journal of Public Administration. Vol. 6, No.2. pp.108-126.
  
- Reich, R. (1990) The Work of Nations: A Blueprint for the Future. London: Simon and Schuster.
  
- Shee Poon Kim (1985) The Evolution of the Political System in Jon S. T. Quah, Chan Heng Chee and Seah Chee Meow (eds.) Government and Politics of Singapore. Singapore: Oxford University Press.
  
- Tan, J. (1993) Independent Schools in Singapore: Implications for Social and Educational Inequalities in International Journal of Educational Development Vol. 13 No. 3 pp. 239-251.
  
- Yeo Kim Wah (1973) Political Development in Singapore 1945 - 1955 Singapore: Singapore University Press.